

Each of the nine Thorne Miniature Rooms at Knoxville's Dulin Gallery of Art portrays a various style of European or American design.

A Miniature Look At Grand Design

At Knoxville's Dulin Gallery of Art, it's hard to resist the temptation to press your nose right up against the glass of the Thorne Miniature Rooms exhibit. Here, every inch represents a foot. There are railings to lean against as you study the tiny details. There are even step stools for young visitors to stand on. Obviously, the gallery encourages these moments of looking, moments that are worth the effort.

The mood in this upstairs room of the Dulin brings back memories of childhood dollhouses. But this is art, or more specifically, it is a study of various eras of American and European decorative styles. You see a Federal dining room, a Victorian parlor, a New England bedroom, an American summer kitchen, and even a room from 16th-century Spain. The range is broad. And so was the collection of miniature furniture and accessories assembled by Mrs. James Ward Thorne, the woman whose hobby led to the creation of these tiny rooms in the early 1930's.

Mrs. Thorne always thought in small terms, although the impact of her miniature rooms is grand. As a child, she doted on dollhouses. As a young girl, she collected 18th-century furniture samples, themselves executed in miniature so traveling salesmen could easily display their lines. And as an adult traveler, Mrs. Thorne scoured both sides of the Atlantic for anything of diminutive proportions: antique miniature furniture with tiny

patterns, everyday remnants of lacy wrought iron, and even colorful box tops that could be made into important details of the period rooms. When reality failed her, imagination took over. You'll see that some curtains are actually delicate linen handkerchiefs. A rug here and there was snipped from a petit point evening bag. A statuesque bust, poised atop a pedestal base, was once the ivory chess queen on a game board. And the candles are just tips of kitchen toothpicks, painted white.

It's almost impossible to single out the improvised appointments from the many items skillfully created by master craftsmen. Stunning scaled-down reproductions of Chinese Chippendale and Duncan

Phyfe pieces are intermingled with mahogany furnishings copied from Metropolitan Museum of Art collections. Tiny blue-and-white delft pottery items, a little Toby jug, and ivory-handled cutlery are perfect in their resemblance to real-life counterparts.

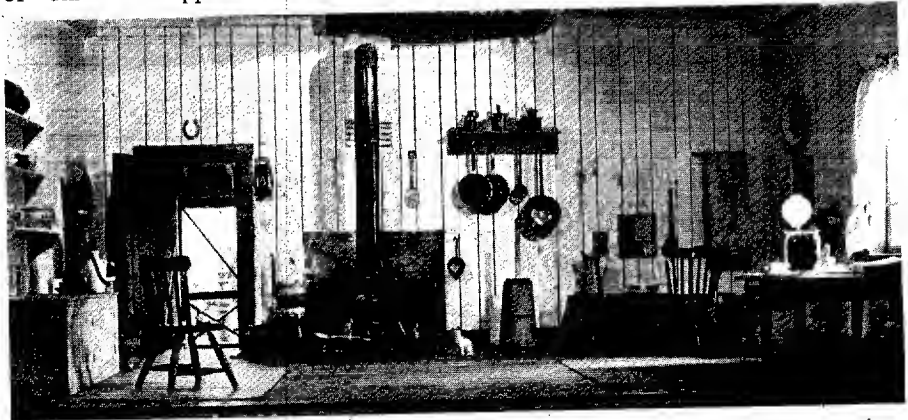
When Mrs. Thorne first assembled her treasures into their proper groupings, there were 29 scenes in all. In 1962, the Dulin acquired nine rooms from the original set of Thorne Miniatures, becoming the only gallery in the Southeast to own part of the collection. Other rooms may be seen in Phoenix and Chicago.

The miniature rooms are only part of the Dulin's story, though. Down the gallery's winding staircase with its red velvet handrail is an elegant entry foyer, with rooms shooting off in four directions. Here, the works of masters are rotated with the artistic accomplishments of regional painters and craftspeople. The artwork is displayed much as it would have been when the wealthy Dulin family first occupied this Neoclassical house back in 1917.

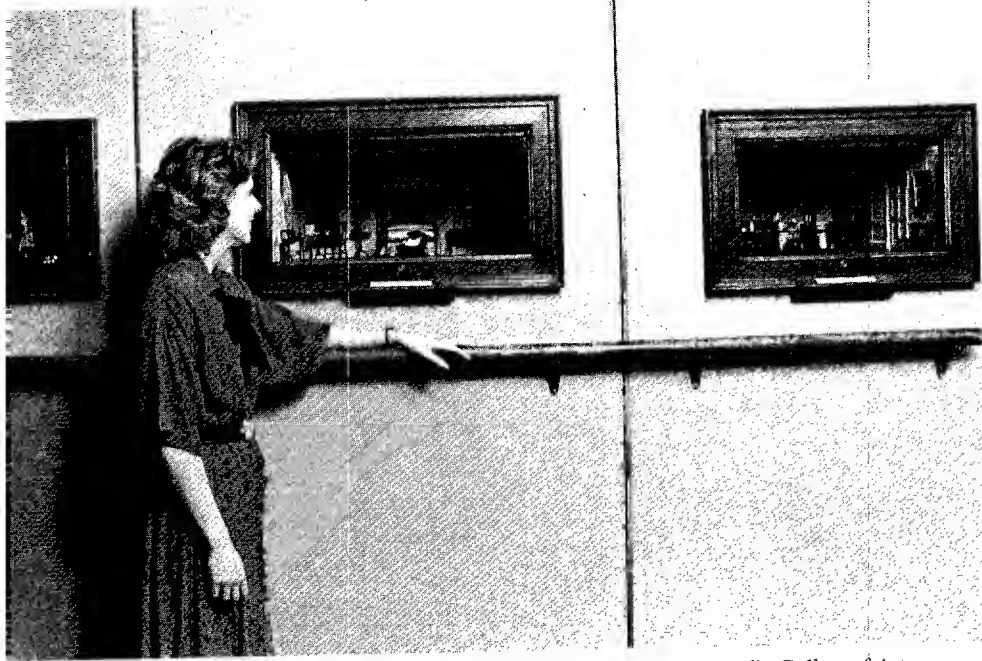
Mrs. Eugenia Bell Dulin commissioned noted architect John Russell Pope to design her dream home on a bluff overlooking a slight bend in the Tennessee River. Pope, who also designed the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., never visited Tennessee to see the Dulin's finished house.

But the people of Knoxville have gotten to know and admire the house. Mrs. Dulin proudly entertained there—one diarist of the era reported that the newly completed home was known to all as the "exposition palace." Following her death in 1961, Mrs. Dulin's heirs decided to truly carry out the exposition palace theme, opening the building to East Tennesseans for use as a regional art center. Today, Eugenia Bell Dulin's portrait occupies a prominent spot in the home she loved, greeting visitors and seeming to sense their delight as they wander through its collections of art.

To learn more, write the Dulin Gallery of Art, 3100 Kingston Pike, Knoxville, Tennessee 37919; or call (615) 525-6101.



A miniature look at an American summer kitchen of the late 1800's shows such details as a good look through the door and a cat by the coal-burning stove. Photographs: Kim McRae



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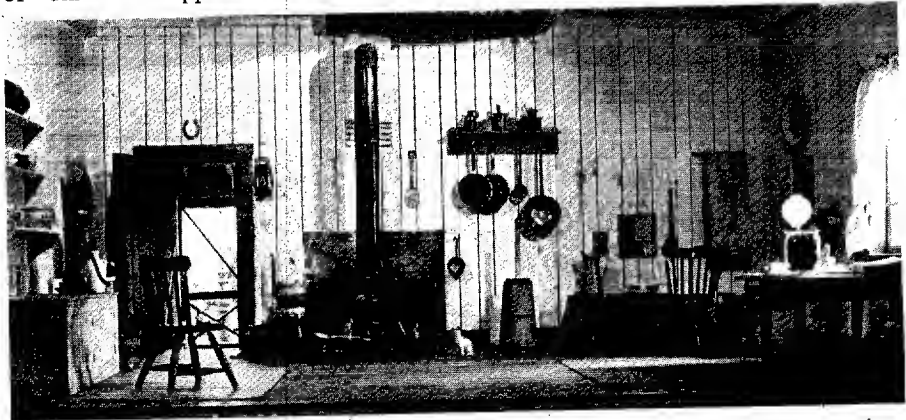
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